

Since the turn of the century, the great 'rural divide' separating the mass of Palestinian peasantry tilling the land within the confines of the village musha' (communal) land tenure system from their landlords and tax-farmers (multazimun), has been modified, supplemented, and transformed. This transformation took place gradually through a combined process of increased monetarization in the agrarian economy; through the dismantling of the musha' system accompanied by land registration and the emergence of the big estates; and by the introduction of a new set of relationships with the urban-based merchants, absentee-landlords, and government officials. By the middle of this century, the destruction of the Palestinian landed elite through the creation of the State of Israel led to dramatic demographic changes in the character of the agrarian regime. Thousands of landless refugees were re-settled inside or near scores of West Bank villages and towns, and a second wave of out-migration -- from both the refugee and non-refugee population -- was triggered off. The differences between the two waves is that while the former was a collective, politically induced exodus, the latter wave was individual, generated by the declining economic fortunes in village and town and by the attraction of work opportunities abroad.

The village economy remains today poor and underdeveloped -- lacking in basic infrastructures for growth. But its occupational-social structure has been visibly transformed. These occupational changes are based today on work opportunities in Israel and the West Bank district centres (construction, industry, and the services, for men; textiles and fruit picking/packing, for women); on salaried positions in the civil service and in private firms; on semi-professional jobs produced by the massive influx of university graduates; and on local investment generated by income sent from abroad.